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Legend of Saint Bernard



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THE LEGEND

OF

ST. BERNARD.



THE LEGEND

OF

ST. BERNARD.

by Wm. Bacon

A POEM,

WITH NOTES.

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THE LEGEND

OF

ST. BERNARD.

CANTO I.

Bright were thy early days old feudal pile !
When echoing through thy paved and fretted halls
The tramp of mailed feet proclaimed thy state,
And throng'd retainers filing from thy courts
Mingled their war cries with the av'lanche roar
Sent forth amid thy mountains ; waxing bold
And more determined 'gainst their fellow men,
As nature, frowning from her unscal'd holds
Defied the efforts of their puny power.
And yet, proud keep ! thou knewest not the gem
Like diamond prisoned in its native mine
Within thy ramparts pent, to waste its fire
Till time should call it from its hidden cell

B

To shame its earthly dwelling place, and shed
A sacred lustre o'er th' admiring world.

Apart from all the empty revelry
And wine-fed mirth of knightly banquet, sate
The heir of Menthon and its pomp ; a youth²
Whose pride of boyhood chafing at the slow
Progressive march of years, had leap'd at once
Into refulgent manhood, though his form
Retained the lingering charm of early grace,
Like the young tendril, vigorous, yet slow
To loose the fairy clasp of tender growth.
The morning lustre of his eyes, unwet
By sorrow's dew—the full expressive lip,
That fearless herald of unclouded thought—
The chiselled features, and the sinewy hand
Moulded for action as it grasps the sword
Before him thrown—all are unstained and pure—
And though upon the mirror of his soul
Passion had lately breathed, the transient cloud
Had made its images more soft, more vague,
But not less beautiful ; his marble brow
Shining above the illuminated page,
Appeared a temple of exalted thought

Where holiness had shed her benison
And closed it from the world. Still o'er the book
In deep abstraction sits the youth, and twice
Ere his shut sense receives the sound, a horn
Is winded 'neath the turret! Suddenly
He starts, and kissing reverently the page—
“What! is the hour arrived? Must clang of arms
Rouze my rapt mind with iron dissonance
From dreams of peace and heav'n? I come, I come
Impatient warder! Yet ere morning break,
Ere yet I bind to this reluctant side
The murderous brand, and gall this humble brow
With the presumptuous casque—there is one hour
For thee Valensa! let me fly to thee,
And drop from heavenly meditation down
To thy scarce lowlier spirit, ere I sink
Again to earth.”

The massive gates are passed,
The grim portcullis dropp'd behind, and now
Down the steep rock o'er which the castle frowns
The youth pursues his dim but eager way
Brushing with heedless foot th' elastic turf
That spreads its verdure o'er the untill'd ground

In prodigal luxuriance ; now he stands
Upon the borders of the lake ; his Squire
Looses the little skiff, and from its stern
The silent boy in listless attitude
Looks o'er the sleeping waters, as the boat
Shoots from the looming shadow of the rocks
Over the scintillating waves, and gains
The lake's unbroken beauty, like to youth
Emerging from its sea of dreaming doubts
Into the calm of intellectual light.
His eye is lifted to those giant forms
By nature in her early strife uprear'd,
The tumuli of buried ages, vast
Wide relics of the war of elements ;
They press upon his soul, and bid it shrink
In its unfruitful nothingness beneath
Their undefined majesty. The sigh
Deep-heaving from his breast, is half despair,
Half welcome to the distant lamp that gleams
Above the water ; toward that feeble ray
He steers his bark with chill and hurried grasp ;
'Tis love's own beacon from the mole that joins
To the mainland his Lady's island home,—
A shell upon the wave, holding its pearl.³

The boat is moor'd, and a low happy voice
Greets its young tenant as he springs ashore
To extacy. . . . Dawn mantles in the east
And still that voice steals thro' his tranced sense,
As the sweet nightingale fills all the air
Which yet is sated not ; while he pours out
The o'erflowing fullness of a soul that shrinks
From sick'ning converse with the barren world.
"My own, my bless'd Valensa ! thou alone
Can'st raise this heart. Alas ! why does it sink
At thoughts that bid the blood in other veins
Throb with a bolder pulse ; why thus revolt
At all the panoply of war, and spurn
Blood-bought distinction ? I have scaled alone
Heights that none else have dared, alone have stood
'Twixt earth and sky, to watch the o'ercharged clouds
Mantling below my feet, and sending forth
Their hollow signals for the tempest's charge,
Till through the vaporous bulwarks shot the flash
Arouzing air and earth to conflict ; where
For every fragile and restricted life
That ends its span in human rivalry,
The giant of a hundred years is fell'd
At each bright stroke beneath his fellow's shade,

And every burst of heav'n's artillery
Calls on the growth of centuries to die.
I've roam'd over the glaciers, I have pierc'd
The forest's depths whence superstition's voice
Instinctive warns the stoutest warrior's steps,
And never e'en suspected that I feared—
But now—now that they call on me to head
My arm'd retainers, and to face with them
The paltry terrors of their human war,
My spirit loathes the task. . . . Valensa! say,
Am I" . . . he press'd his suddenly flush'd brow
And stoop'd as at her feet he half reclined,
Till on her knees his quivering face was hid
In irrepressible emotion. . . . No!
I am not, cannot be—a coward." . . .

“Thou!

A coward thou! had the whole world proclaim'd
The hideous lie, I had defied it. . . . Thou! . . .
Could my heart rest on thee if such thou wert?
Believe me love, thine only cowardice
Is to distrust thine own surpassing worth,
To deem the strength that raises thee, a crime
Because 'tis not the virtue of the crowd.
There is a courage that demands no clash

Of meeting arms, no trumpet's shrill appeal
To call it into action, which exists—
A soul within the soul—in native strength
Scorning the bondage of the helm and shield.
Such is thy courage. . . . Go ! I send thee forth
Armed by none other than thy Maker's hand,
In all the beauty of an unstain'd heart,
Where self, the coward's idol, hath no place.
I twine no silken favour in thy casque,
Nor bid thee bring me bloody trophies home,
But when thou com'st with knightly grace to crave
My guerdon, looking brave and beautiful
Above thy fellows, it shall be for him
Whose heart saves where his conquering hand
would strike.

“ And my reward, Valensa ? ”

The pale light
Play'd o'er the kneeling boy, the maiden's face
Was buried in her hands—she answered not,
But when, obedient to his sign, the boat
Shot from the creek, Bernardo heard his name
Breath'd in Valensa's last adieus, with words
That told him all.

The bark went on its way ;
Yet watching its scarce visible career
Valensa lingers, and when distance shrouds
The little vessel's track, still breathlessly
She stands, to catch the dipping oars, while tears
Heavy as rain-drops on the gossamer,
Swell in her silken lashes, and her lips
Repeat the words last whispered at her side,
In idle echo. Years have seem'd to pass
In this short interview, for 'tis the last
Before Bernardo with his maiden sword
Flush'd with the fame of knighthood, shall return
To claim her as his bride. As yet her thoughts
Had not o'erstepp'd the girl, and her pure mind
Absorb'd in present bliss, or in her pray'rs
Rising at once to heav'n, o'erleap'd the time
That lay before her. Suddenly she seem'd
To feel the woman stealing on ; her cheek
Burn'd when she thought upon the fervid words
Her love had forc'd from her, yet not with shame—
How little had she told ! but the deep sense
Of all that was awaiting her, arose
Within her heart, filling its buoyant sphere
With weightier but more precious feeling, like

The mists that float along the face of heav'n
To temper yet enhance its loveliness.
The horn, winded before the castle gate
For Bernard's entry, floated o'er the lake
In mellow cadence, and she dream'd herself
That castle's mistress, and her lord returned
From perilous adventure—but a cloud
Hung o'er the picture—*was* his soul too high
To feel the world's ignoble sympathies?
Too richly fraught with immortality
To bend to such commands? She dar'd not guess,
But rais'd her eyes in hurried prayer on high.

Daylight had burst from its eternal source,
And while the Alpine peaks rejoicing blushed
Though all below was pale, a single ray
Fell midway down the opposing mountain side
And brought out into luminous relief
A sainted hermit's cell; on the bright spot⁺
The maiden's eye in mute enquiry fixed,
Asked if that beam were fraught with deeper sense,
Or but his daily meed of sacred fire
Sent to its pure inhabitant? the ray
Linger'd like heavn's blessing, till the sun

Rising above the snowy barriers, threw
His slant rays on the rocky fastnesses,
And Menthon's tower half shadowed, half revealed,
A giant stretching forth his cumbrous limbs
Seem'd, slowly waking; on the drawbridge rude,
And winding down the steep descent, appeared
Banner and helmet glancing on the edge
Of night's withdrawing curtain, like the stars
Upon her own horizon, while the lake
Still lulling in its silvery smoothness, bore
The distant war cry to Valensa's ear.
The sound broke through her trance, again she saw
Her lover in the pride of knighthood, girt
With train and trapping—pierc'd with fancy's eye
The envious veil of distance, and pourtrayed
His noble charger, and his nobler self
Panting alike for fame—then looking round
As though the very dawning would betray
Her hesitating confidence, she made
The zephyrs bearers of a timid kiss,
Sighed one fond prayer, and sought her castle-home.

CANTO 2.

Gay, gorgeous time ! when courtly chivalry⁵
Like the bright colours of the falling year
That bid the scene with fruitless lustre glow,
Trick'd out in its fantastic pageantry
The follies and the vices of the world,
There were some hearts that in their freshness bloom'd
Unscath'd amid thy blandishments, or caught
A mellowed lustre from thy transient glare.
Of these Bernardo was ; in childhood's day
He worship'd war, but only when its ranks
Marshalled in unattainted splendour, passed
Before him from the court ; when eager tongues
By hundreds shouted forth the name he bore
Exulting in its glory, when his sire
Clad in his glittering armour rein'd the steed
Bernardo panted to bestride, and hailed
With all a father's pride, the vehemence

That almost wept for fame. O then the helm
Seem'd to him honour's crown. Alas ! too soon
The vision was dispelled ; the leaguered fort,
The hurried flight and hot pursuit, he saw
And heeded not, these might be for the right—
But there were direr mysteries to chill
His youthful blood. Within the donjon's depths
He had seen captives, beings who had learned
To count each moment by its pang, to watch
For their own sighs as the sole evidence
That spoke to them of life ; had known them sink
Unheeded to a grave not colder than
Their dungeon, by a path too horrible
To be betrayed ; had wept, had prayed for them
In vain, and rushing from the dreadful scene
Too oft repeated, fled to the wild glen,
The pathless forest, and the Alpine height,
To escape the pestilential breath of war,
And shake off in unsullied solitude
The loathsome sense of guilt and misery.
There flowed his bitter tears, without a hand
To dry them, or a human eye to drop
Its meed of sympathy : nature became
His friend, his deity ; he worshipped her

With his whole being, learned to trust himself—
To argue with the world against its crimes,
So out of harmony with heav'n, and shunn'd
His martial home for the lone hermitage
Where knowledge op'd for him her varied path,
And piety her early handmaid, lent
Sure guidance through its mazes, leading him
Tow'rd its fair ending—immortality.

Bernard was happy—coveted no change—
But his proud sire, impatient lest his heir
Should to renown be lost, by a soft lure
Won back the ardent stripling; then it was
He first beheld Valensa, tasted first
A joy by repetition made more sweet,
That cloyed not on the appetite, but drew
All hopes, all wishes 'neath its influence,
And bathed them in its atmosphere of bliss
'Till life itself became a cloudless heav'n.

But time grew ripe for action—war broke in
With stirring voice upon his love. His sire
Ere yet the maiden was his bride, decreed
His first emprise to scale his native Alps⁶
With secret band against an ancient foe,

Whose castle overhung Helvetia's vales,
And sack the nest while yet the bird was flown
In search of distant prey ; himself remained
To awe a nearer enemy, but sent
His veteran Squire, Udolpho, to direct
And guard Bernardo's first essay in arms.
Proudly the father gazed upon his child
As with a heart still throbbing, and a cheek
Flush'd by remembrance of the last fond hour,
The lover vaulted to his charger's back,
Reining its fiery instinct with the grace
Of Macedonia's prince ; devoutly breathed
A blessing on his head, and as he gave
Udolpho secret orders his harsh voice,
Lost something of its sternness when he press'd
Caution upon the wary squire, his eye
Fix'd with an anxious meaning on his boy.

Ye that know solitude but as she's prank'd
In the trim garb of cultivated life,
Where art encroaching upon nature's range
Almost forbids her freedom ; ye that fear
To seek her where she sits in shrouded state
'Mid Alpine forests of uncounted growth,

Or thron'd upon the shattered pinnacle,
Reigns over desolation—cast your eyes
Once more into departed centuries,
Ere man had turned the avalanche in its fall,
Spann'd the sunk chasm, and pierc'd the mountain's
flank,
Skirted the precipice, and with bold hand
Presum'd to smooth her rugged brows, and ope
His passage to her inmost heart: —Behold
The youthful warrior toiling up the steep
With unrelenting foot, and far before his band
Exploring granite-girded rents that seem
The passage to a cold eternity—
Leaping the yawning chasm, and fearlessly
From the o'erhanging fragment that replies
In terrible vibration to his foot,
Pointing with outstretched arm to where the path
May safely be pursued. See him again
Unfurl his banner on the glacier's brink,
Where by each wave of the translucent waste
Its colours are a thousand times thrown back,
And hear him shout his war cry, thro' the pass
To urge his train ; while he upon its heights
O'erlooks the vallies bosomed in repose

Where as the tramp of mailed horses crush
The scanty herbage, echo sends the tale
Through the basaltic chambers of the Alps
In startling thunders. Higher yet they mount
And touch the boundaries of eternal snow,
Where nature, from a mother prodigal
Of blessings, changes to a rigid queen,
Whose sov'reignty raised far above the sphere
Of human action and of human love,
Courts not the full tongued gratitude of man,
But in its vast and chilling dignity
Compels him into silent awe.

'Tis night !

Slowly the numb'd and drooping warriors wind
Into a snow clad hollow, where a lake
Lies cradled 'mid the mountains towering round
Like giants set to guard its slumbers ; soon⁷
The watchfires throw their sparkles o'er its breast,
The clang of falling arms along its shores
Resounds, and the diminished band tell o'er
Their comrades, lost before the fame they sought
Had shone on them, their undistinguish'd grave
The snow wreath, and their noisy requiem

The roar of tumbling torrents. . . . The young chief
Is still alone among the impending rocks
O'erlooking the blank scene—not blank to him !
For memory, at sight of that still lake,
O'er-mastering the onward stream of thought,
Hath floated him to other shores ; he leans
Upon his bloodless sword, with every sense
Entangled in the web of fancy, till
Each rugged line before him melts away
In one entrancing whole—Valensa ! Hark !
What cry was that ? replied to by a shout
As if the mountains had been voiced—a glare
From a yet loftier peak, is downward thrown
Extinguishing the paler watchfires' ray
And lighting up with painful vividness
The armour of the men. Are the fiends there
Exulting o'er the world, or have the caves
Yielded their monsters to dispute the pass ?
Bernard beholds his troop with wondering gaze
Look round, while each resumes with startled haste
The breastplate and the shield, as prompt to oppose
Wild ambuscade or unknown enemy.
Upward he presses, his experienced eye
Takes in at once the perils of the ascent,

And with athletic energy he shuns
Destruction, still advancing till his foot
Is placed in safety on a jutting crag,
That hangs but one bold spring above the scene.

Rear'd at the foot of everlasting snows
That gleam'd with chilling and sarcastic smile
On its unholy frame, bright 'mid the glow
Of sacrificial fire, a temple stood⁸
Within whose columns rose the idol form
Of the fall'n thunderer, not as once he tower'd
On Rome's imperial hill, when heav'n-taught art,
Lent him her power to subjugate the soul,
That knew not yet its immortality,
But reigning in a dull degraded shape
O'er timid ignorance. Upon the steps
Of the rude shrine, red in the lurid light,
Knelt hideous age, unlovely infancy,
And life in its full hardihood and prime,
Crook'd into strong deformity—the chief⁹
Looks down with a perplex'd but melting eye
On faces dull'd by hopeless ignorance,
Or scathed by passion in its licence, till
Their human semblance was half lost ; he hears

The rout 'mid joyless clamour offering up
Fearful petitions, and his spirit quails
Beneath the degradation of his kind.

"Thus then," he cried, "thus do they send me
forth

To dog their victims like the blood-hound ; thus
To dye my hand in human gore, and slake
Their most unchristian vengeance, while there live
Such scenes as these to rouse my better soul
To action, and to quench the earth-born flame
Of passion, with the tears of charity.

O thou unfathomable mystery !
Thou life that like the atmosphere doth fill
Unlimited creation ! wherefore giv'n
To be thus trifled with by him who bears
His maker's image ? . . . Wake my sleeping soul !
Thou'rt in as foul a bondage as you slaves,
That dar'st to take the life thou canst not give,
Fearing to set thyself at liberty."

The youth is rapt, he hears not the loud tramp
Of steel-clad warrior's foot, but suddenly
He sees the flashes of the blazing pile
Reflected by a shield, and the swart form

Of old Udolpho, issuing from the pass
That winds between the crags down to the lake,
With uprais'd arm before his eager band.
'Twas not the first time the stern veteran
Had scaled those gloomy regions, or beheld
The heathen worship; his remorseless creed,
Imbibed from warlike zealots who had taught¹⁰
No mercy to unblest idolatry,
Was compass'd in a dreadful rule, "the sword."
Ere their young leader could by word or sign
Denote his presence, forward rushed his men,
While from their path the heathen horde fell back
In mute amazement, till Udolpho seized
The kneeling priest upon the altar steps
And dashed him to its foot.—Like Raphael arm'd
For heav'nly retribution—his cheek pale
With stern excitement—Bernard from the crag
Sprung on the soldier, and with lightning stroke
Felled him to earth; "Minion," he cried "is't thus,
Thou dar'st assume thy leader's place, and war
With undefended peace? Back warriors, back—
We come to oppose the strong, not crush the
weak.

Udolpho staggered to his feet.

“ My Lord,

Do ye not note the pagan temple, mark

The idol, and the heathen worshipping?”

“ Aye soldier, but 'tis not the sword must root

This curse from out the land,—away! away!

I cannot feel with thee! there is a tie

Drawing me to the victims of thy hate

Stronger than all thy zeal.”

“ My Lord, your sire”—

“ Use not his name to sanction cruel deeds!

'Tis mine, here to command—thine to obey—

Begone I say! draw off thy men, and wait

Till morning light thee, vulture as thou art

To fitting prey—these shall not glut thy rage.”

The impetuous youth stands on the temple steps

While his still murm'ring band file thro' the pass,

Gazing upon the crouching multitude,

Who with wild gestures pray him to give life

As he hath sav'd it, and amid this mass

Of living, feeling misery, hedged in

By trackless snows, he looks a spirit sent

To shed heaven's mercy, where the world shed none.

He speaks not, but his quivering lip, his eye
Raised in intense devotion, his strong arms
Writhing in tightened fold upon his breast,
Betray some contest; but no other sign—
No word reveals its cause; unheeding all
The wondering homage of the cowering herd,
He contemplates the idol—then as roused
To full remembrance, he with sudden act
Invoking heaven above the kneeling throng
Breaks through them, and regains his wondering
camp.

CANTO 3.

But where is she in this momentous hour,
Whose fate hangs on its issue? She whose heart
Fix'd upon one bold stake, hath risk'd its all
And waits a rich return; alas! she hath prov'd
A spendthrift in her treasury of hope,
And now that busy faces round her beam
In earnest of her coming joy, she sits
In pensive reverie, without a smile
To pay back in return. Never before
Hath Bernard¹¹ left her; with the hour of prime
He was beneath her window; when at noon
Her palfrey, or her boat bore her through air
In all the happy consciousness of life,
He was her guide—her guard—and when at eve
The twilight with its undefined power
Softened her soul, and rais'd it to the realm

Of dreams, he was her brightest vision ; now
She is alone. Alone ! how much that word
Pourtrays, when echoing in fancy's ear
Like the last whisper of the evening wind,
Or latest moan of the retreating storm,
As touching on the sweet or jarring chords
Of memory !—who would not be alone
When hopes and wishes, creeping silently
And known but to itself about the heart,
To shed a sacred charm o'er languid life,
At once are blasted ! who would be alone
When the soul, fainting 'neath its load of bliss
Must share the burthen with a kindred soul ?
Joy craves companions—sorrow is its own.

Days come and pass ; Valensa hath not seen
Bernardo—but his band have reach'd their home,
Her watchful eye hath marked them on the shore ;
The promised signal too hath been displayed
And she hath heard brave tidings of her knight.
The fort is won, the garrison dispersed,
The tarnished spot on Menthon's shield wash'd
out
In the red current of her foemen's blood.

Each bark that scuds across the lake, gives out
Some tale of the young warrior's gallantry ;
And yet he comes not ! Wherefore this delay ?
A thousand fears assail her, she essays
Vainly to frame excuses for this cold,
This new neglect ; the day is drawing near
That he so long hath sighed for, yet his boat
Rolls in its little bay. Love takes the alarm
And in the feverish torture of suspense
Valensa wanders o'er the rugged paths
So oft pursued in brighter hours, and scales
With mountain maiden's graceful hardihood
The steep ascent, to gain a larger view
And watch her lover's coming o'er the lake,
Till at the hermit's solitary cell
She stops to beg a blessing on her way.

With trembling hand, and heart that quicker throbs
After her recent toil, she lifts the latch. . . .
The daylight falls upon a kneeling form
Cased in the warrior's garb, saving a head
That droops unhelmeted before the Cross
In silent adoration. It is he !
It is Bernardo !—Yet Valensa paused

Pass'd not the threshold, but gazed breathlessly—
She would not break upon his hour of prayer
'Though joy was wild for utterance—till the air
Lifting the curls upon his brow, the youth
Rais'd his sunk head, and met those well known
eyes.

"Thou here Valensa! do I see thee here
Ere I have school'd my heart to look on thee
With one throb less!"

"Bernard! and is it thus

We meet?"

She bounded to his arms—

"Thou'rt not,

Thou art not false?"

"Let not suspicion cloud

The brightness of thy mind, I am still true—
True as the sun above us."

"Thanks for that

Then thou art still mine own?"

"He looked on her

Till sight wan'd in its own intensity—

"Thou hast not seen a fairer face than mine
Among yon frowning mountains?"

“ I have seen
Sights to have turned a ruddier cheek than thine
To palest alabaster, to have made
Hearts grown as hard as their own breastplates,
melt ;—

Let me not tell them thee, lest I become
Thy murderer by heart-destroying words—
And yet ! the cloud of sorrow hangs o’er thee
And I must ope its heavy torrent.”

“ Nay
I’ll not believe thou hast betrayed thy trust ?”
“ As soon had I betrayed my soul ! O no,
The *christian* knight against his *christian* foe
Hath fought and conquered—witness this red
sword,

My polished plaything till they called me up
To draw it on my brother. Nay, shrink not,
’Tis but the blood of hirelings who had ta’en
My life, had I not struck the surer blow ;
It hath hewn down nor age, nor innocence,
The baron’s wife and little ones”—

“ Are safe—
’Twas like thyself.”

“ Oh praise not thou my deeds,
I’ve that to tell will make thy gentle heart
Deny itself, and mock at mercy. . . .
High in yon snowy pinnacles that look
The emblems of eternal purity,
I found a heathen temple”—

“ And thou razed
The impious fabric to the ground ?”

“ Not so,—
There is no law within the code of heav’n
That says, destroy, but its whole spirit breathes
Through the world’s living beauty, the command
To save ; I felt it in that pregnant hour
When superstition’s victims at my feet
Grovell’d in loathsome worship, and the sense—
The thrilling sense of power to save, o’ercame
For a brief space all thoughts of sacrifice
And drove me to the sudden deed ; I swore
To plant the Cross upon that heathen mound,
And draw with gentle hand the blinded souls
Beneath its holy shadow, though my heart
Shed every hoarded treasure at its foot,
And burst in yielding them. Guess all the rest—

On me it fell with swift and sick'ning blight
When calm had come again, and in the depths
Of my devoted soul, whispered me false!—
And yet Valensa, I must hear thee speak
That word in helpless agony, for now
Though every echo of the Alps should throw
My falsehood back to thy proclaiming lips,
I may not, dare not call thee mine.”

She spoke

No word, but loos'ning the fond clasp
That joy had tighten'd round his arm, she press'd
Her hands before her eyes, as to shut out
Conviction ; sinking on the rock-hewn seat
As crush'd at once,—then sudden, like the ship
That, trembling from the shock of winds, regains
Its placid way after the fitful blast,
She rose above the tempest of her soul
In forced serenity. “Obey thy vow”
Hoarsely she said, “Obey thy sacred vow,
And think no more on me.”

“Oh speak not thus!

Martyrs have suffered in the holy cause,
But years of lengthen'd torture had been short
To these few hours of agony.”

“ I know,—

I know thy suffering Bernard—but 'tis past,
On in thy heav'n taught path—leave sorrow here.
Think not a woman's weakness prompts my words ;
I felt thou wer't too noble for the world,
And rather than my heart should bind thee down
To earth, I'd lay it at thy feet—I *can*,
I *will* be happy in thy greatness.”

“ Ah !

Promise me that ! promise thou wilt not soil
My sacrifice by sinking 'neath the blow—
They'll tell thee I am perjured.”

“ They dare not,

They shall not breathe a whisper 'gainst thy fame,
I'll be its shield.”

“ Oh exquisitely fair !

Must I thus tear the lily from its stem
And ask it to live on ? Alas ! 'tis vain.”

“ Nay dearest ! look not on this face again,
Or I will mar its beauty ere thou turn
To be again unstrung.”

“ 'Tis not thy face

Incomparable maid ! thy soul it is—
Thy soul, that with its brightness dazzling me

Lures me to follow it."

"Then let its light

Point out thy path to heav'n ! Bernard I kneel

To crave thy blessing as heav'n's minister,

Henceforth I see thee in no other guise." . . .

He stretch'd his arms as if to circle her,

Then for a brief and harrowing moment, gazed

Into her face, imbibed its purity,

Bent over her in scarce heard orison,

Touch'd her pale forehead with his lips—and fled.

Alas ! what noble outcasts are the great

From the world's aggregate of happiness !

They who from an exalted region, shine

Above mankind as guiding beacons, lit

By an eternal hand. Not through a mild

And ever radiant atmosphere do such

Climb the high heav'n of their supremacy ;

But through the storms of passions too intense

To be at once commanded, through the mists

Of prejudice—the clouds of drear neglect,

Athwart whose mass the meteor-flash of hope

Streams often with delusive blandishment,—

While as they rise, the little world that bask'd

In the uncourted beauty of their dawn
Wanes in the widening prospect, and they blaze
Alone in their meridian plenitude
Upon a cold and thankless universe,
As the bright luminary of the north
Sheds o'er tumultuous and unheeding seas
Its steady splendour. But their triumph comes—
A triumph nobly worthy of their toil,
When 'neath commanding mastery, the mind
Springing from out the tangled coil of life
Grows in unlimited expansion, grasps
All nature in its keen intelligence,
Through the world's tortuous philosophy
Seizes upon the simple creed of truth
And sinking *here* in its *hereafter*, leans
With holy fealty upon the hope
Of an immortal payment. On this calm
This stormless sphere hath Bernard almost
touched—

But he hath yet one victory o'er himself
To atchieve. The cherish'd ties of early youth
Are broken through—the world and its report,
The claims of kindred, and that dearer bond
The flowery chain that fasten'd him to life—

He stands amid their ruins, on the verge
Of earthly sacrifice, panting to break
From joys that like the waves of Tantalus
Rise to his lip, and yet forbid its touch.

He is alone within his chamber—look
Upon that face! a sudden change is there
Since first we viewed it, wrought in fleeting weeks
That compass'd in their fierce and anguish'd span
The mental struggles of a life; time's seal
Hath stamp'd with hasty impress on that brow
The stern serenity of years; the glow
Of florid health is gone, like early bloom
From the rich fruit when morning skies prove
• rough,

And the firm buoyancy of youthful strength
Hath sharpened to rigidity. He sits
In high-wrought resolution, the cold damps
Rising upon his brow, and his pale lips
Trembling with the strong effort to restrain
Emotions, that if once uncurbed, had set
Subjection at defiance, and 'unthron'd
Reason herself; the glimmer of the lamp
Falls on his toys of boyhood, that look out

Like friends upon his misery, and chide
The flight they cannot stay --the rustic bow
The hunting spear and jesses for the hawk,
The favorite book are there, while his strain'd ear,
Acutely quicken'd in its sense, drinks in
Each sound of preparation for the morn
That should have made him blest, the frequent
tramp
Of coming guests, the menial's busy steps
And careless laugh, the minstrel's mellow claim
For entrance. Oh 'twas like the passing knell
Of his departing joys! His full heart swells,
But breaks not—silently he sits
Till ev'ry sound in Menthon's towers is hush'd
Save his own quiv'ring breath—then first he hears
The storm without. Midnight at last is come!
Few hours before the dawn that should have strewn
Its roses in Valensa's bridal path!
But dunnest curtains shadow the sad heav'n
Save where the lightning's fiery arrow flies
Along its murky scope, to ope a vent
For the encased thunder, peal on peal
Bursting in triumph from its prisonment,
While the mad echoes from the mountains, shout

Their welcome at its freedom ; the chaf'd lake
Boils in the general phrensy, and the boats
Moor'd for the morrow's pageant, break away
Tossing amid the turbid waters ; yet—
His hour is come, and brooks no tarrying,
Though nature fling her terrors in his path ;
For flight would be impossible if known.
Calm as the stormy elements are rough
Bernard unclasps with cold but steady hand,
His lonely turret window, and looks down
The precipice below—the cords are slung—
One moment's pause—that moment is an age
Of concentrated pain—he falters not,
But as the torrent's headlong rush is heard
With startling clearness in the thunder's pause,
He seems to own its angry challenge, leaps
Upon the parapet, and boldly pois'd
In the red glare that pierces the abyss
But half its depth, sinks resolutely down,
Steering his dizzy track with hand and foot
Through crags that threaten his destruction ; safe
He lights upon the mountain's gloomy edge
And looks up breathlessly a mute farewell !

No time for pause, no time for thought—he strives
Against the hurricane's o'ermastering force
And thanks the lurid lightning as it gleams
Upon the hidden chasm ; he presses on
Rouzed by the maddened elements, till doubt
Gives place to proud excitement, and he scorns
To call it danger ; with undaunted zeal,
He labours through the hours of darkness, till
Uprais'd o'er earth's impending canopy
Into the heav'n's untarnish'd light, he views
The baffled tempest like a guilty thing
Fleeing before day's sun-lit majesty.
Exhausted on the scanty turf he lies
And drinks in from the fountain of his soul
The balm of conscious rectitude ; hope springs
Into new life, and as the stately scene
Of nature rising at her maker's call
Rouzes his fainting energy, he kneels,
The single intercessor for his kind
Amid her kindling splendors, and implores
The power to elevate degraded man
Above the varied forms that round him live
In the mute homage of obedience, and

To draw from these his soulless monitors,
The lesson of his own supremacy.

Through fleeting years, was Bernard's fate unknown
Save but to one—and now the veil of time
Hath hidden the mysterious agency
By which he hunted superstition down
From her unholy housing. Pride is loud
And glaring in its office ; piety
Though as diffusive as the summer's breath
Is as invisible. Ages have past
And Menthon's towers in unretriev'd decay
Mock at their ancient splendor ; but where still
The sullen lake sleeps in its cheerless bed
Amid the unchanging Alps, there dwell the heirs
Of Bernard's holy fame ; yet husbanding
His seed of mercy, and at winter's feet
Reaping a harvest of perpetual love ;
While purged from guilt the mountains rear their
heads
In crownless majesty, acknowledging
The single handed toil that made them pure,
And chronicle in deathless gratitude
The sainted name of their deliverer.

NOTES.

1.—The materials for the present story are drawn from Mr. Bakewell's interesting "Travels in the Tarentaise," and as they contain a much more succinct account of the scene of St. Bernard's birth and early life, than any other work, the few notes that have been considered necessary will be extracted from the same source. Chateau Menthon, one of the earliest Baronial Castles now in existence, and where St. Bernard was born in the year 924, is situated on the shores of Lake Annecy in Savoy, but a short distance from Geneva. It is an irregular building with the massive gates and portcullis of the Norman school, and containing furniture which is said to be coeval with its foundation, evidently a mistake, though it is very ancient. The Castle is situated on an eminence commanding a view of both ends of the lake, and surrounded on all sides by bold and picturesque mountain scenery. It is usually reached by boats, and the steep ascent to it, is now clothed with vineyards, while the shores of the little lake stretching away from its foot are studded with the ruins of buildings of its own class, bosomed in fine forest trees, or nearer to the water's edge, with comfortable modern farm-houses peeping from among chesnut and walnut trees, the peculiar growth of the district.

2.—St. Bernard of Menthon, the hero of the tale, and so called to distinguish him from the Saint of the same name who flourished

at a much later date, is one of no great nominal importance in the Catholic calendar, however useful he may have been to the cause of religion. The authentic records of his life are necessarily very scanty, giving us a mere outline of his history. St. Bernard was heir to the large feudal possessions of the family of Menthon, and an only child. He appears in his youth to have cherished a desire to enter the priesthood, which his father endeavoured to counteract by an early marriage with a young lady of Chateau Duing. The eve of the day on which this union was to take place arrived, before Bernard, fixed in his resolution for a holy life, had the courage to break from the chain, and he then only effected his escape by letting himself down from a window in the Castle, still shewn, and whence the miracle to which tradition attributes his safe descent, seems scarcely less than sufficient to screen him from destruction in the perilous exploit. He fled over the mountains to Aoste, was ordained, and became afterwards Archdeacon of the Cathedral there. "Possessing the zeal of an Apostle," says Mr. Bakewell, "he could not rest satisfied with the easy duties of his office, but burned with impatience to destroy the worship of the heathen deities, for they were still adored in some of the sequestered vallies of the Grecian and Pennine Alps. He employed himself for forty-two years in preaching to the inhabitants of these regions, and succeeded in overturning the statue of Jupiter on Mont Jou (Mons Jovis) now *the Great St. Bernard*. At that time also there was a column (Colonna Jou) dedicated to Jupiter, near the summit of that part of the Grecian Alps, at present called *the Little St. Bernard*. During his long residence in these savage parts, he was deeply affected by the numerous melancholy catastrophes he witnessed of travellers being lost and buried in the snow, and after he had destroyed the remains of heathen superstition he laid the foun-

dation of the two Hospices, which still bear his name on the Great and Little St. Bernard, to serve as resting places for travellers who crossed the higher Alps into Italy." St. Bernard died in 1009, aged 85. Tradition adds, that his parents found him after twenty-six years of search, in the Hospice on the Great St. Bernard. A picture of the Saint is still preserved in the Castle, which represents him as very handsome, and a corresponding portrait of his beloved has beauty enough to exculpate the poet from stretching the bounds of probability too far, in submitting the heir of Menthon for a time to her fascinations. There are sufficiently numerous examples of heroic devotion to the service of Christianity among the early supporters of the Church, but it is hardly to be supposed that those holy men were emancipated from human feelings and sympathies, in the early stages of their career; their minds were of that class, which advancing before their age, freed themselves from the shackles of station and custom in their choice of life, and had at the same time the self denial, to bend, in the prosecution of their high objects, to those ordinances which cut them off from the enjoyment even of the innocent pleasures of life.

3.—Chateau Duing, anciently called Chateau Vieux, having changed its name to a village near it, is built upon an island or promontory on Lake Annecy, which advances so far, as nearly to divide the sheet of water into two equal portions; the whole extent of the lake being about ten English miles in length, and from one to two in breadth. The peculiar features of the lake are the numerous vallies that slope down towards it, enclosing in their intricate haunts, some of the most interesting scenery of this most picturesque portion of Europe, and still farther rendered attractive by the traditions and ancient reminiscences that cling to their neighbourhood. Chateau Duing, now the abode of modern hos-

pitality, is described by Mr. Bakewell as a long plain building, not unlike an English worsted or cotton factory, but having at one end a round tower of great antiquity. It is placed on an eminence, cut into cultivated and ornamental terraces, the island on which it stands being connected with the main land by a narrow causeway, where there was formerly also a drawbridge. "There are historic traces of the castle as far back as the ninth century," says Mr. Bakewell. It defended the passage from the upper to the lower part of the lake, on the western side, in conjunction with another castle or fort, situated on an eminence, on the opposite side of the road. This is now nearly demolished, except an hexagonal tower in the same style of architecture as Coningsberg Castle, in Yorkshire."

4.—On the banks of the lake in the neighbourhood of Chateau Duing, stand the ruins of a large Benedictine Priory, and near them, those of a chapel and hermitage, appertaining to it. Its site has been slightly altered to suit the purposes of the story, but its actual existence is correct. The winding road cut in the rock, to the abode of the anchorite is even now very beautiful.

5.—The age of chivalry, in the stricter application of the term, may be said to have commenced only with the Crusades, but its spirit was abroad much earlier, and was in fact gradually diffused throughout Europe, after the time of Charlemagne. Sir Walter Scott, in his "Essay on Chivalry," says, "it began to dawn in the end of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh century," so that, according to a very competent authority, the author has only indulged a license in antedating a few years at the worst.

6.—There are no data on which to found this portion of the poem, but the assumption of St. Bernard's having borne arms, is not ill grounded, for as he was probably educated like all the youth of his time, in the exercises and pursuits fitted to the heir

of a noble family, it is scarcely possible to suppose he would have been on the eve of marriage, before he had mixed in those enterprizes in which all the efforts of the age were absorbed. The remonstrances held with the Pope by St. Bernard on the license of the priesthood of his time shew him to have been no bigot, nor had he entered any religious order more strictly than to become a Canon of the Cistercians. His first impulse after his escape was to overcome the heathenism existing among the mountains, so that he must have had actual experience of this fact, nor would a mind of such purity of principle, have been led to such determination without having first gone through the slow process of conviction.

7.—The name of the Great St. Bernard appertains strictly to a pass among the mountains, not to the mountain itself. The principal features of the site of the Hospice are beautifully displayed, in an engraving in Beattie's *Switzerland*, but the lake is so frequently covered with snow, that in one instance a traveller spent some days at the monastery without being aware of its existence. One of the amusements of the inmates is to descend the slope of the rocks to the lake in sledges, which slide easily and with great velocity along the ice, the noble dogs partaking the sport.

8.—The site of the temple is still pointed out by the Monks, who have formed a collection of coins, bronzes, and votive tablets, found among its ruins. For a more detailed account of the Hospice and temple, with their early history, we refer such of our readers as do not already know the work, to "*Brockedon's Excursions in the Alps.*"

9.—The Alpine villages in this range present even now pictures of misery and barbarism that are truly revolting. Mr. Bakewell says "the persons round our char at Villard Goitrou presented

the most melancholy picture of the physical degradation of our species I had ever beheld, united with an extreme degree of poverty and destitution equalled only by that of the poorest wretches in Ireland, with goitres so large as to bear a considerable proportion to their dwarfish bodies, with heads, features, and forms scarcely human, many of them unable to speak, but expressing their wants by grating noises and uncouth signs; they exhibited all the horrors of deformity combined with idiocy and extreme wretchedness." "The depravities of heathen rites nine centuries ago, must have accumulated the horrors of this terrible picture.

10.—Again says the same intelligent writer, "At the period in which St. Bernard lived, the only Christians who penetrated into the retired vallies of the Alps, came in troops clad in steel to cut the throats of other Christians, headed by Barons or armed Bishops, who met them for the same kind purpose, and both parties plundered, ravished, or murdered the poor pagans who lay in their route. Such practices were not well suited to recommend the religion of the cross: debased as it then was, it seemed to possess but little advantage over heathenism. But St. Bernard was a Christian of a very different kind. He considered his religion as something better than "a cunningly devised fable," and that it was intended for nobler purposes than to fill the coffers of the clergy. He was perhaps the first true Christian the Pagans of the Alps had ever seen. His enthusiasm and perseverance, tempered with benevolence and good sense, produced the effects of the fabled lyre of Orpheus, in humanizing the savages of the desert."

11.—Some readers may be inclined to demur to the use of two methods of writing the same name, and the Author has but a flimsy defence to bring forward. It must principally rest on the

superior euphony of the Italian pronunciation, the variety it gives to the verse, and the licence admissible in matters of such slight importance. It is however more than probable that such a change actually took place, as Saints were not often canonized by the precise name they bore before entering upon their sacred calling.



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